



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

January 18, 2005

Mr. Lawrence G. Provins
Assistant City Attorney
City of Pearland
3519 Liberty Drive
Pearland, Texas 77581-5416

OR2005-00556

Dear Mr. Provins:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 216886.

The City of Pearland (the "city") received a request for "permits submitted/approved, certificates of occupancy and building plans" for certain property at a specified address. The city takes no position with regard to the public availability of the requested information. You believe, however, that this request for information implicates the interests of private parties. You have submitted the information in question. You also notified two private parties of this request for information and of their right to submit arguments to this office as to why the information should not be released.¹ We have reviewed the information you submitted.

Initially, we address the city's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code. This section prescribes the procedures that a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is excepted from public disclosure. Section 552.301(b) requires the governmental body to ask for the attorney general's decision and state the exceptions to disclosure that it claims not later than the tenth business day after the date of its receipt of the written request for information. *See* Gov't Code § 552.301(b).

¹*See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d); Open Records Decision No. 542 (1990) (statutory predecessor to Gov't Code § 552.305 permitted governmental body to rely on interested third party to raise and explain applicability of exception to disclosure under certain circumstances).

Section 552.301(e) requires the governmental body to submit to the attorney general, not later than the fifteenth business day after the date of its receipt of the request, (1) written comments stating why the governmental body's claimed exceptions apply to the information that it seeks to withhold; (2) a copy of the request for information; (3) a signed statement of the date on which the governmental body received the request or evidence sufficient to establish that date; and (4) the specific information that the governmental body seeks to withhold or representative samples of the information if it is voluminous. *See id.* § 552.301(e)(1)(A)-(D). Section 552.302 provides that if a governmental body does not request an attorney general decision as prescribed by section 552.301, the requested information is presumed to be subject to required public disclosure and must be released, unless there is a compelling reason to withhold the information. *See id.* § 552.302.

In this instance, the city did not request this decision within the ten-business-day period prescribed by section 552.301. Furthermore, the city did not timely comply with section 552.301(e) in requesting this decision. Therefore, the submitted information is presumed to be public and must be released, unless there is a compelling reason to withhold any of the information. *See id.* § 552.302; *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ). The presumption that information is public under section 552.302 can generally be overcome by a demonstration that the information is confidential by law or that third-party interests are at stake. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 630 at 3 (1994), 325 at 2 (1982).

An interested third party is allowed ten business days from the date of its receipt of the governmental body's notice under section 552.305 to submit its reasons, if any, as to why information relating to that party should not be released. *See* Gov't Code § 552.305(d)(2)(B). As of the date of this decision, this office has received no correspondence from either of the private parties that the city notified under section 552.305. Thus, neither of the private parties has demonstrated the existence of any compelling reason to withhold any of the submitted information from the public. *See* Gov't Code §§ 552.101, .110(a)-(b); Open Records Decision Nos. 552 at 5 (1990), 661 at 5-6 (1999). Therefore, the city must release all of the submitted information to the requestor.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the

governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

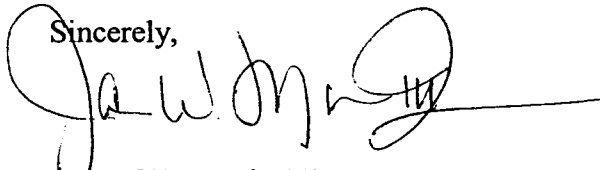
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James W. Morris, III', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/sdk

Ref: ID# 216886

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Ms. Claudia Pezzia
335 West 21st Street
Houston, Texas 77008
(w/o enclosures)

Heflin Building Systems, Inc.
1201 West Arbrook Boulevard, Suite 109A
Arlington, Texas 76015
(w/o enclosures)

Lentz Engineering
1328 South Loop West, Suite 201
Houston, Texas 77054
(w/o enclosures)